



James River 2007



This 61.5-mile section of the James River from Scottsville down to Watkins Landing has historically been one of Virginia's best freshwater fisheries. The smallmouth bass fishing has been a real attraction to anglers for many years. Unfortunately, severe weather events in the late-1990's and early 2000's have caused a severe downturn in the fishery. Especially drastic were the drought of 2002 and flooding of 2003. Research has shown that the smallmouth population in this river is dependent upon moderate river flows, especially in June. Drought or flooding at this time can cause the current spawn to fail. This has happened numerous times during the last ten years. The good news is that river flows, and thus, recruitment of young fish was extremely good in 2004 and good in 2005. The fishery appears to be on the road to recovery.

This report discusses electrofishing sampling results from two of the furthest downstream sampling sites: Watkins Landing and Maidens Landing. High water prevented us from completing sampling at Westview and Columbia.

This area of the river contains an excellent diversity of fish species; 20 were documented in this very limited survey. Smallmouth bass (24 per hour of electrofishing) was the most abundant species in the samples, followed by redbreast sunfish (14 per hour) and bluegill and channel catfish (8 per hour each).

The smallmouth population appeared to be improving in 2006, but the fish are still smaller than anglers would like. All indications are that reproduction was fair in 2006. The overall catch rate for young-of-the-year smallmouth at these sites was 13/hr, which is well below the historical average for this river. However, numerous fish from the successful 2004 and 2005 year classes were also collected. These fish were approximately 8-13-inches long. Only two fish longer than that were collected, which is symptomatic of the previously mentioned reproduction failures in previous years. Hopefully, spawning and recruitment conditions will be optimal in 2006, allowing the population to continue its recovery.

The bluegill and redbreast sunfish collected were generally less than 6 inches. The only other group of fish from these samples that is worth mentioning to anglers is catfish. Channel catfish was one of the most abundant species collected in the survey. Fish from 12-26 inches were common, and offer a nice resource for anglers who enjoy pursuing this species. A few flathead catfish were also collected, but they were not large. Overall, this area of the James River offers an excellent diversity of sport fish and a recovering smallmouth bass population that anglers are encouraged to enjoy.